

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes July 12-13, 2007

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

July 12-13, 2007

Blackfeet Reservation

Browning, Montana

Members present: David Boyd, Dan Burke, Denise Corrao, Faith Dawson, Andrea Falcon, Dalayna Faught, Don Jones, Maureen Kenneally, Carol Lambert, Christina Mattlin, Ron Mills, Paul Pearson, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Michelle Williamson, Mavis Young Bear

Members absent: Sharla LaFountain, Jackie Colombe, Wayne Nankivel, Claudette Vance, Dennis Moore

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Brigitte Winfield, Matt Bugni, Marilyn Daumiller, Scott Williamson, Doug Robinson, Nan Bryant, Scott Tanner, Connie Phelps, Sharyl Wells, Roberta Racine, George Kipp, Rowena Gone, Kathy Laurin, Denise Dawson, Max Bear, Carol Juneau, Earl Old Person, Maynard Kicking Women, Sam Hubbard, Donna Harris

Thursday, July 12

Earl Old Person opened the meeting with a prayer, and Dick Trerise called the meeting to order at 10:00.

State and National Update

Joe Mathews discussed the results of the Legislature. The Legislature maintained VR's state funding to fully match the federal grant. In addition, they funded both the Montana Youth Leadership Program, a program for high school aged students with disabilities, and a new transitions development counselor in Missoula.

On the federal level, we still don't know when the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the Rehabilitation Act will be reauthorized. The last reauthorization was in 1998, and Congress has been working on a new reauthorization for many years. Vocational Rehabilitation is getting ready for its federal review during 2008.

SRC Training and CSAVR Meeting

Dick Trerise reported on the national State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meeting he and Peggy attended in April. About 50 people attended the meeting. About 6 – 8 SRC chairs have been working on setting up a national organization of SRCs. The organization has been having teleconference calls every 2 months with state council chairs and their staff (Peggy normally sits in on these). They are working on a mission statement, and at this point there is no formal organization structure and no dues. Dick suggested we talk more about this group at our meeting in October. On the same trip, Dick also attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation meeting along with Joe and Peggy. Dick mentioned that there is a lot of federal emphasis on accountability, and it is good to have the chair attend the meeting.

CANAR Update

Mavis Young Bear handed out the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR). She stated that there are 72 Section 121 Native American VR projects in the US. These projects run vocational rehabilitation programs similar to the state, but on Reservations. However, while states automatically get federally funded for VR, Tribes must apply for the Section 121 funding, and not all Tribes get funding. Montana has Section 121 projects on 6 of its 7 Reservations. Montana's Section 121 projects serve similar disabilities to the state's program, and they have noticed an increase in mental disabilities—including depression, learning disabilities and PTSD—in recent years (just as the state has).

Cultural Training

Maynard Kicking Women presented information on cultural issues. He is concerned that many young people on the Reservation do not know how to speak the Indian language and do not know many of the traditional Indian ways. He showed the Council some beadwork projects and a drum that Tribal members had made. He is conducting classes for Tribal members on traditional crafts and on language.

MonTech

Kathy Laurin talked about MonTech—a federally funded assistive technology program at the University of Montana. MonTech has a number of adaptive devices for people with disabilities. They lend out these devices so a person can try out the technology before buying it. They also conduct evaluations and make recommendations for adaptive devices that will work for an individual. They serve all disabilities and all age groups. They especially like finding low-tech (inexpensive) solutions to problems, and they are trying to collaborate with other agencies.

Blind and Low Vision Update

Doug Robinson from the Great Falls Blind and Low Vision office discussed services to people with visual disabilities. Blind and Low Vision is part of Vocational Rehabilitation and runs three programs: (1) regular vocational, (2) older blind, and (3) emergency medical. They collaborate with other organizations such as the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB), Low Vision Montana (lowvisionmt.org) and Montana Association for the Blind (MAB). MAB conducts a one month summer orientation program for people with visual disabilities each summer, and that is going on now at Carroll College in Helena.

Business Enterprise Program Update

Sam Hubbard from Montana Business Enterprises described the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) in Montana. BEP allows people with visual disabilities to operate vending stands and vending machines on state and federal properties. The program was reorganized to make it more fiscally efficient a couple years ago. Currently the program has 5 vendors—vending routes in Helena, Billings, and Missoula and snack bars in Helena and Missoula. The cost of the program is about \$23,000 per vendor, but the per vendor cost will decrease as more vendors are added.

Future goals include:

- Expand the existing routes so that the take home pay for each vendor is greater than \$25,000 per year.
- Add new routes---six live stands, including Malmstrom, and three new routes (Great Falls, Bozeman, and Butte)
- Start vending machines at the highway rest areas.

- Increase the leased income by \$60,000 per year including vending at Malmstrom and the rest areas.
- Improve financial strength and stability of the program including paying out back salaries by September 30, 2008.

Sam stated that it may be hard to make the program self sufficient, but they will get close with the Malmstrom vending and the highway rest areas.

Native American Panel

Mavis Young Bear, Sharyl Wells, Roberta Racine and Max Bear described the Section 121 Native American VR projects on their Reservations. They provide many of the same services on the Reservation that the state provides generally. A person on a Reservation can be served by either the Section 121 project or by state VR or both. Sharyl reported that they have many employment outcomes at the new casino. Mavis mentioned that a large issue is stigmatism. Max stated that Section 121 projects can provide healing ceremonies. He also mentioned that there are not enough independent living services on Reservations.

Policy of Paying for Masters Degrees

Bob Jahner talked about the issue of when VR should pay for post graduate studies. He is working with the people who originally brought up the issue--Dan Burke, Don Jones and Faith Dawson --to see if he can come up with points of agreement as a starting point. VR currently has a policy on when VR will pay for a master's degree, and this discussion is to clarify the policy. Council members had some different points, such as before spending money on post graduate work, VR should concentrate on becoming more known, and therefore serving people with just bachelors degree needs. Other people thought that master's degrees maybe should be encouraged, because they might give a person more of chance to get a job. The discussion will continue at the next meeting.

Brain Injury Update

Paul Pearson gave the Council an update on the Brain Injury program. He mentioned that Montana is number two in the nation in incidence of brain injury. He is doing well in his recovery, and attributes his improvement to a new drug that he began taking six months ago.

Friday, July 13

Committee Reports

See Appendix A.

Carol Lambert moved that the Council start a program that recognizes employers who hire people with disabilities and employees with disabilities for the good job they have done. The motion passed.

The Transitions Committee asked that the Council invite Ellen Swaney to address the entire council regarding the university system's criteria for disability services.

Montana Telecommunications Access Program

Connie Phelps described the Montana Telecommunications Access Program, which helps people with telephone disabilities (mostly deaf or hard of hearing) communicate. The program has two components—equipment and relay. The equipment part of the program provides amplified phones, text telephones (TTY), and other adaptive devices for people who have difficulty with regular phones. People who receive this equipment must meet an income limit, but even people above the income guideline, can receive information, referral, and training. The relay part of the program allows people to communicate with a person who is deaf through a relay system. The relay operator passes information back and forth between the TTY user and the other person. In video relay, a sign language interpreter and a camera on the deaf person's screen are involved.

Public comment

Bob Jahner—Issue on post graduate work will be on the next meeting's agenda.

Carol Lambert—This year more hunting licenses are available for people with disabilities.

Carol also invited people to call her in her role as a Legislator at any time.

Doug Robinson—Collaboration is important, and he is trying to work on it.

Connie Phelps—People are invited to stop in and see the MTAP equipment when they are in Helena.

Announcements

Next meeting date—October 11-12 in Helena.

Appendix A
Public Relations Minutes
July 13, 2007

1. Create more PR strategies for radio and television PSAs. Peggy will look into this with Maureen's help.
2. Develop a Business Recognition Program, "Overcoming the Odds:"
 - Seek out success stories
 - Form nomination process
 - Design Certificates
 - Study North Dakota program
3. Make three copies of Denise's video to share with new council members.
4. Continue to brainstorm ideas for educating legislators

Appendix B
Transitions Minutes
July 13, 2007

The majority the committee's time was spend hearing from Bob Jahner as he described how the new MVR position of Transitions Counselor/Coordinator came to be and how it has evolved to this point---realizing that there are still some unknowns.

He shared the following: the Legislature provided MVR with an FTE targeted to provide services to those individuals moving from the secondary school system to adult services and this was influenced by the work that had been done by the National Governor's Association. The Governor's Office wants to see "big picture change" and MVR wants to demonstrate within the "school to work picture" how it can be done.

The position is currently being advertised. The position will require a minimum of three years experience as a VR counselor. It will be housed in Missoula but will require travel as it will have some state-wide responsibilities, and consequently it will be supervised by Joe Mathews.

The committee ran short of time, but agreed that we still wanted to meet with Ellen Sweney. The purpose of our meeting would be to discuss the eligibility criteria for students to access disability related services on the various campuses.

We also, very briefly discussed the possibility of meeting with June Hermanson to determine if her proposed website would be a viable option for collaboration with the website work Faith has been doing on behalf of the committee.

This committee requests additional time at future meetings to work on the goals of the committee.

Appendix C
Native American Minutes
July 13, 2007

1. Barbara will contact the 121's regarding their interest in holding next year's MVR council meeting on their Reservation.
2. Request that MVR send a staff member to the annual & biannual CANAR conference, if there is adequate funding.
3. MVR will continue to encourage MVR staff to attend the Native American Brain Injury conference.
4. Provide cultural sensitivity training to the MVR council in the coming year.